

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-02 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-02 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

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FM AMCONSUL BELFAST

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1828

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

UNCLAS BELFAST 345

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINS, PINT, UK

SUBJECT: CHRISTMAS TERRORIST CAMPAIGN

REFS: (A) BELFAST 340 (B) BELFAST 328

1. SUMMARY: THE PROVISIONAL IRA'S CHRISTMAS TERRORIST CAMPAIGN CAUSED LARGE PROPERTY DAMAGE FROM FIRES, INJURED SEVERAL IN THE SECURITY FORCES AND CAUSED MUCH INCONVENIENCE AND NERVOUSNESS AMONG THE POPULACE. ALTHOUGH THE OVERALL LEVEL OF VIOLENCE DURING THE MONTH WAS PROBABLY A LITTLE LOWER THAN 1976, THE PRESENT CHRISTMAS PERIOD WAS MUCH WORSE, SINCE THE PIRA IN PREVIOUS YEARS HAD DECLARED A CHRISTMAS CEASE FIRE. THE PROVISIONALS DID NOT, HOWEVER, PULL OFF A SPECTACULAR EVENT, WHICH THEY MAY HAVE INTENDED. END SUMMARY.

2. THE BASIC PATTERN CONTINUED DURING THE SECOND HALF OF DECEMBER (REFTELS), BUT IN CONTRAST TO PREVIOUS YEARS THE PROVISIONALS DID NOT DECLARE A CHRISTMAS CEASE FIRE. ON THE CONTRARY, THEY DECLARED AN INTENSIFICATION OF THE CAMPAIGN IN MID-MONTH (REF A), AND CARRIED IT UP ALMOST TO CHRISTMAS DAY ITSELF, WHEN APPARENTLY MOST PROVISIONALS STAYED HOME BY THE FIRE OVER THE WEEKEND. SHOPPERS WERE UNNERVED BY THE  
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CAMPAIGN, AND THE LEVEL OF TRAFFIC WAS LOW COMPARED TO EARLIER YEARS. SECURITY FORCES WERE OUT IN LARGE NUMBERS OVER THE HOLIDAY.

3. AFTER THE MANY CLAIMS OF AN IMPROVING SECURITY SITUATION THE CHRISTMAS SEASON INCIDENTS WERE PARTICULARLY DISHEARTENING AND HAVE PROBABLY LESSENERED LOCAL MORALE. THE CHRISTMAS WEEKEND

ASIDE, THE PIRA CAMPAIGN EMPHASIZED THE USE OF FIRE BOMBS -- MANY THE COMBINATION OF A SMALL BLAST BOMB AND GASOLINE, OFTEN SET OFF AFTER A SHORT WARNING GIVEN AS ARMED MEN PLANTED THEM IN BUSINESS PREMISES. FEW PEOPLE WERE HURT IN THESE BLASTS AND FIRES. MOST OF THE ACTION WAS IN BELFAST, SOME IN LONDONDERRY, AND A LITTLE IN OTHER SMALL TOWNS. THERE WERE IN ADDITION A FEW SHOOTINGS AT POLICE AND ARMY, THREE INEFFECTUAL GRENADE-THROWINGS AT THE ARMY, A FAIR NUMBER OF SMALL ARMED ROBBERIES AND KNEE CAPPINGS, AND SOME BOMB HOAXES ON THE BELFAST-DUBLIN RAIL LINE. TWO MEN WORKING FOR THE SECURITY FORCES PART TIME WERE BADLY HURT BY BOOBY-TRAP BOMBS, AND ONE CIVILIAN DOING CONSTRUCTION WORK FOR THE POLICE WAS SHOT SERIOUSLY. AND THE NIGHT OF DECEMBER 21, IN WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN AN ATTEMPT AT A SPECTACULAR EVENT, BOMBS WERE PUT INTO MORE THAN A HALF DOZEN HOTELS AROUND THE PROVINCE. NOT MUCH DAMAGE WAS DONE. THE BOMB LEFT AT THE PRESTIGIOUS CULLODEN HOTEL IN BELFAST'S SUBURBS WAS FOUND BEFORE IT WENT OFF, AND THE YOUNG COUPLE WHO APPARENTLY LEFT IT WERE ARRESTED. THE MAN MAY BE A DUALL (U.S.-U.K.) CITIZEN.

4. ONE PLAN-CLOTHED SOLDIER WAS KILLED DECEMBER 14 IN BELFAST, POSSIBLY IN RETALIATION FOR THE KILLING BY A PLAIN-CLOTHED SOLDIER OF A YOUTH IN LONDONDERRY DECEMBER 12. REPORTEDLY THE YOUTH -- A MEMBER OF THE IRISH REPUBLICAN SOCIALIST PARTY -- PULLED A WEAPON ON THE SOLDIER, WHO SHOT HIM.

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5. IN AN UNUSUAL ACTION, HUNDREDS OF SECURITY PEOPLE DECEMBER 15 PICKED UP ABOUT 15 PERSONS ASSOCIATED WITH THE PROVISIONAL SINN FEIN (PIRA'S LEGAL POLITICAL FRONT). THEY WERE RELEASED AFTER TWO OR THREE DAYS' QUESTIONING, BUT THE PARTY'S NEWS DISTRIBUTION APPARATUS WAS PUT OUT OF BUSINESS LONGER. REPUBLICANS CHARGED POLITICAL HARRASSMENT, BUT THE POLICE SAID INFORMALLY THAT THE RAIDS WERE IN THE CONTEXT OF A LONG TERM INVESTIGATION INTO TERRORIST ACTIVITY.

6. DURING THE MONTH THERE WAS SOME DISMANTLING OF SECURITY BARRIERS IN SEVERAL RURAL TOWNS. BUSINESSMEN WELCOMED SUCH MEASURES IN THE CHRISTMAS SHOPPING SEASON, BUT THE DISMANTLING REFLECTED THE IMPROVED SECURITY SITUATION. THERE IS NO INDICATION THAT THE MORE ELABORATE DEFENSES OF BELFAST AND LONDONDERRY WILL BE TOUCHED.

7. COMMENT: THE AMOUNT OF PERSONAL, PROPERTY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DAMEGDONE BY THE PROVISIONS DURING THE PAST WEEKS DOES NOT COMPARE TO THE AVERAGES OF PREVIOUS YEARS, BUT IT CANNOT BE LIGHTLY DISMISSED. CHRISTMAS WASH SPOILED FOR MANY PEOPLE, AND PIRA MADE ITSELF FELT. BUT IT LOOKS AS THOUGH PIRA HAD WANTED TO PULL OFF A SPECTACULAR EVENT, AND FAILED -- JUST AS

HAPPENED DURING AUGUST'S VISIT BY THE QUEEN. WE THEREFORE KEEP  
OUR FINGERS CROSSED, SINCE PIRA LIKES TO DO THE UNEXPECTED.  
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